

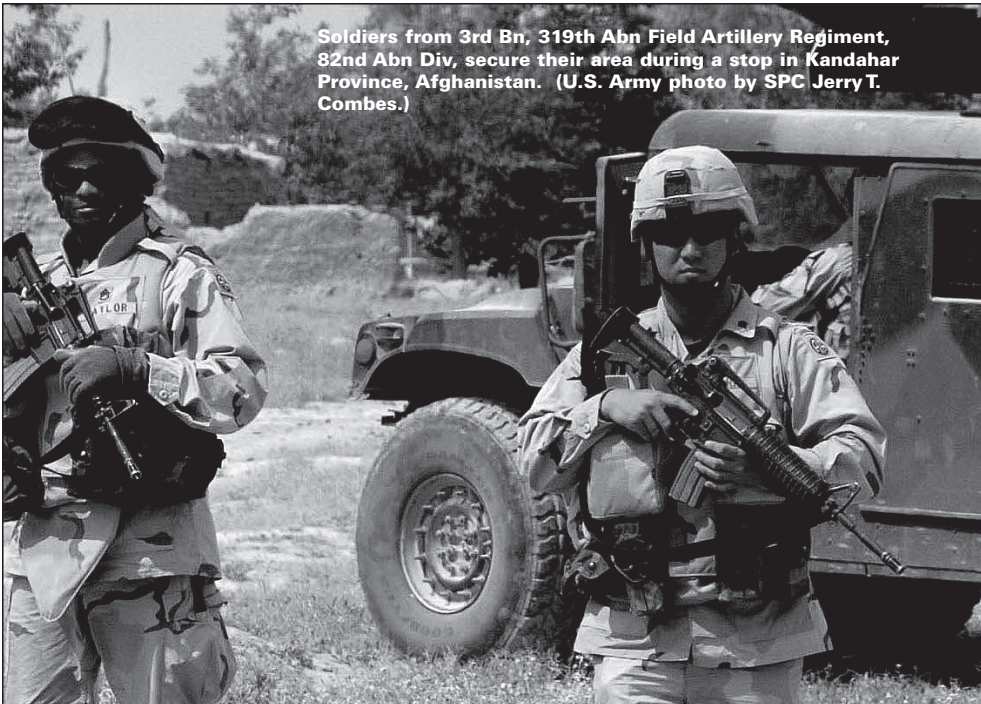
# Soldier Innovations Sought

Natick Soldier Center

**T**he *Soldier Innovation Initiative (SII)* is seeking resourceful equipment ideas from Soldiers who have served in *Operations Enduring Freedom* and *Iraqi Freedom*.

SSG Kevin Randolph, 1st Battalion, 505th PIR, shows Secretary of the Army Dr. Francis J. Harvey some of the weapons assigned to 82nd Abn Div Soldiers during the Secretary's visit to Fort Bragg, April 12, 2005. (U.S. Army photo by SSG Carmen Burgess.)





Soldiers from 3rd Bn, 319th Abn Field Artillery Regiment, 82nd Abn Div, secure their area during a stop in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan. (U.S. Army photo by SPC Jerry T. Combes.)

to gather field feedback. The *SI* piggybacks on these visits to specifically target installations with units returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

OFIG has been collecting field feedback for 20 years and the team employs three engineering psychologists who specialize in survey development and interpreting field feedback. The psychologists have developed surveys designed to prompt Soldiers to provide their innovations, creative modifications, field solutions and newly created or improvised items while in the field.

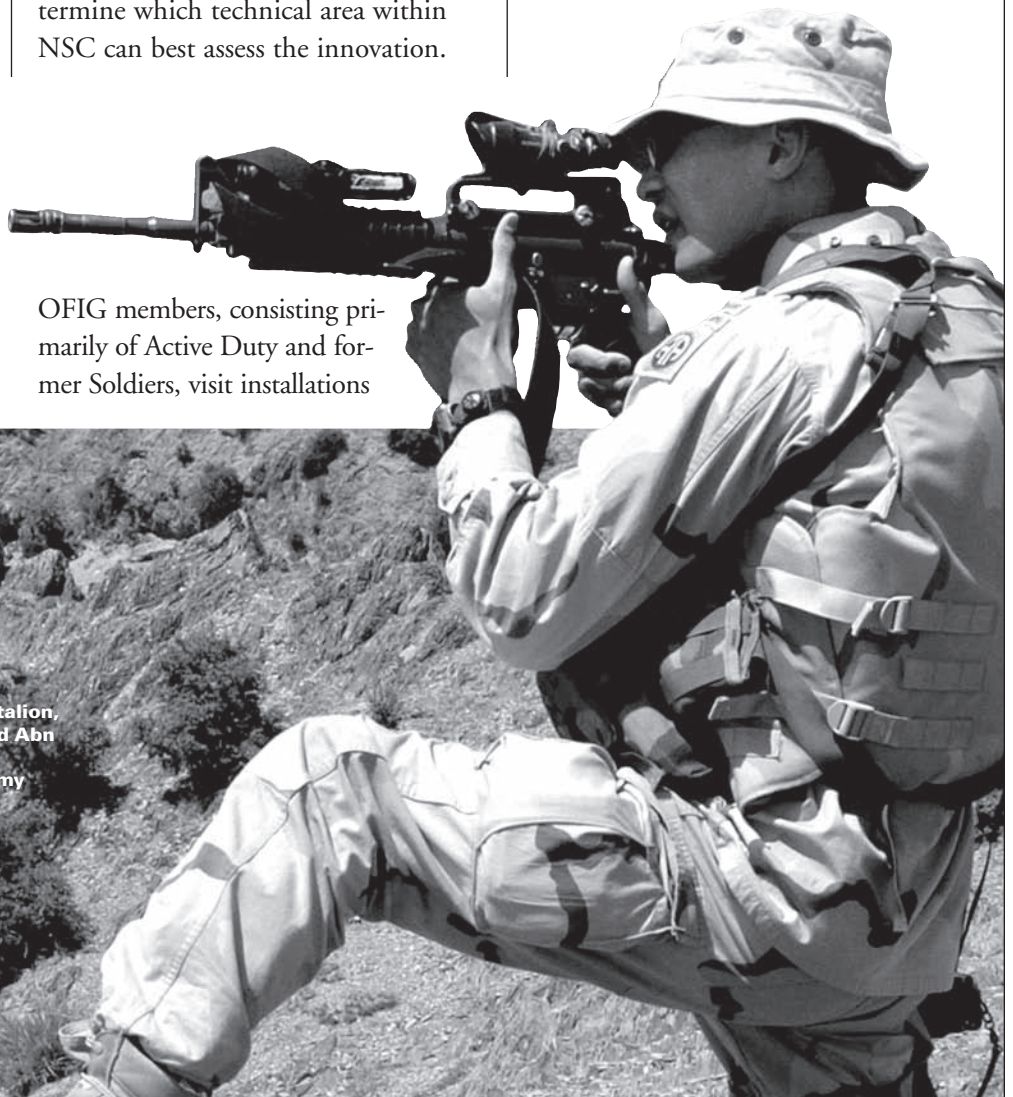
Soldiers are asked to provide information on their ideas and digital or hard-copy photographs to enhance

The Natick Soldier Center's (NSC's) Operational Forces Interface Group (OFIG) at the U.S. Army Soldier Systems Center, Natick, MA, began the effort in January 2004 to capture Soldier-modified equipment in the field as well as identify new equipment Soldiers have created from materials in the field.

process to field new or improved equipment. Ideas are reviewed to determine which technical area within NSC can best assess the innovation.

The project's goal is to discover successful field ideas, prototype the best ones for further evaluation and potentially influence the development

OFIG members, consisting primarily of Active Duty and former Soldiers, visit installations



Using the scope of his M4 carbine, Alpha Co. Commander CPT Edward Hollis, with 2nd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR), 82nd Abn Div, scans a ridgeline for enemy activity near Zambar, Afghanistan, May 12, 2005. (U.S. Army photo by SSG Bradley Rhen.)



understanding of their ideas or designs. Soldiers also submit contact information so they can be reached for further clarification, explanation or input.

Project officers conduct a review to determine when ideas merit further pursuit. Soldiers are sometimes invited to NSC to aid in prototyping and evaluating their ideas.

OFIG will continue to gather recommendations from returning units, providing new ideas for assessment and possible further development and fielding.

An initial survey with 2nd Battalion (Bn), 27th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division (Tropic Lightning) [25th ID], Schofield Barracks, HI, and units from the 82nd Airborne Division (82nd Abn Div), Fort Bragg, NC, now deployed in Afghanistan, provided several interesting and practical Soldier innovations, including a map pocket sewn into the inside of a patrol cap;



SGT John Diaz (right) and fellow Scout Platoon Soldiers from Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Bn, 27th Inf Reg, 25ID, patrol a snow-covered road in southern Afghanistan, March 11, 2005. (U.S. Army photo by SGT Frank Magni.)

modified sling that allows an M-4 carbine rifle to hang in the ready position; commercial earpiece for a Soldier Intercom that is better integrated with the Kevlar® helmet; and golf bag straps attached to a M-240B assistant machine gunner's bag to carry the weapon in a ruck configuration.

The NSC believes that the *SII* features important differences in process and scope than the Army Ideas for Excellence Program because the initiative employs OFIG to actively solicit creative ideas and solutions from returning combat Soldiers.

Soldiers whose ideas fit within the Army Ideas for Excellence Program are also encouraged to participate in the *SII*.

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For more information about the NSC's *SII* program or OFIG, please visit our Web site at: <http://www.natick.army.mil>.



CPT Walter Christian, 411th Civil Affairs Bn, patrols near Wajihyah, Iraq, June 2, 2005. Like so many other Soldiers, he finds a new way to more effectively sling his weapon so it is always at the ready. NSC's OFIG is hoping to capture Soldier-modified equipment ideas to better assess form and functionality for the future. (U.S. Air Force photo by SSGT Suzanne M. Day.)

